



The National Guard of Kansas contracted with the Kansas State Historical Society (KSHS) in 1996 for a cultural resources survey of the Kansas Army National Guard (KSARNG) installation consisting of various properties owned, operated, or used by KSARNG. The primary purpose of the study was to survey, identify, and record all significant cultural resources owned, used or impacted by KSARNG. The study was intended to fulfill the Guard's obligations as required under the National Historic Preservation Act, as well as other laws.

As a result of the contract, KSHS staff surveyed and inventoried all 70 KSARNG sites and evaluated each for historical significance. A final report entitled "Kansas Army National Guard Cultural Resources Survey" was submitted by KSHS staff member Randall M. Thies last year. The survey identified 58 armories, with only three built before World War II; these three armories in Hiawatha, Kingman, and St. Marys were determined eligible for nomination to the National Register. A previous article in Kansas Preservation addressed these three historic armories.

This article covers the collection of Cold War armories constructed under the leadership of Adjutant General Joe Nickell between 1951 and 1972. Known as the "Nickell's armories," they were deemed significant and will soon be old enough for Register consideration.

Post-war Armories Spring Up Throughout Kansas

They aren't usually considered beautiful buildings; but anyone who has ever attended a basketball game, community dance, or large meeting in one of Kansas' modern National Guard armories must surely appreciate the building's purely functional design. The mass of armories built in Kansas after 1950 followed standardized interior and exterior plans, allowing the most serviceable buildings to be constructed with a minimum time and expense.

Although they were badly needed, few armories were built immediately after World War II due to the national housing crisis and the public's postwar disinterest in the military. Without armory facilities, recruitment and training efforts for the Kansas National Guard were crippled. As the Cold War developed and the Korean War flared, the public began to realize the benefits and need for an expanded military, including an enhanced National Guard. After 1953, the American military and Kansas National Guard promoted continuous adaptation and growth, resulting in federal and state participation in the construction of armories. The Kansas Guard's best spokesman, Brigadier General Joe Nickell, propelled much of the new construction. The persuasive and politically savvy Nickell served as Adjutant General of Kansas from 1951 until 1972.

The lasting reminder of Nickell's term was the construction between 1953 and 1962 of 57 armories in 54 Kansas cities, with one additional armory completed a decade later in 1973. Today 46 of the Nickell's armories remain in active service; some are no longer used by the Guard.

"Nickell's armories" is an obviously appropriate term to describe these facilities. Joe Nickell's experience as a newspaper editor, news broadcaster and state senator meshed with his career in the National Guard. By the time he rose to the position of Adjutant General, he was well equipped to promote the expansion of the Kansas National Guard installation. The need in the 1950s and 1960s for armories was clear, due primarily to three factors. First, between 1940 and 1950, Kansas shifted from having a mostly rural population to an urban population, a trend that accelerated in the 1950s and 1960s. Second, the Korean War exposed deficiencies in the quality of US military equipment, readiness, training, and ability to mobilize. Third, the Reserve Acts of 1952 and 1955 provided several categories of military obligation and incentives. These three factors contributed to Guard recruitment and a massive armory-building program.



(Left) Based at the KSARNG Armory at 3617 South Seneca in Wichita are Co. C, Co. D, and Detachment 1 of Headquarters and Headquarters Company of the 2nd Battalion, 137th Infantry Regiment, 69th Brigade, 35th Infantry Division, and Detachment 2, Co. B, 169th Support Battalion. Photo by Randy Thies.

(Below) The KSARNG Armory at Norton is used by the 170th Maintenance Company. Photo by Randy Thies.

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Nickell appealed to local communities, stressing the benefits that would come of having an armory in terms of payroll and for use as a community center. A 1948 law decreed that 75 percent of the construction cost of future armories would be paid for by the federal government, with state and local governments paying the balance; after 25 years, each of these buildings would revert to state ownership. In many cases, the city donated the land on which the local armory was built. The armory-building program between 1953 and 1962 was the largest peacetime task ever accomplished by the Kansas National Guard.

Armories also took on new importance in the 1950s as centers for civil defense and disaster relief, which were new roles for the Guard. The importance of the Guard in dealing with natural disasters was particularly realized in the 1951 flood, one of the most disastrous floods in Kansas history. With these factors in

mind, the Kansas Army Guard and number of armories grew enormously.

With federal funding came a uniformity of design. Most of the armories of this era were of a "contemporary" style, with Kansas armories being no exception. Nationally distributed plans were contracted out to local builders. Constructed with clean lines and primarily flat roofs, the new armories were often identical, not only from town to town, but from state to state as well. Although lacking in the architectural distinction of their predecessors, the Nickell's armories clearly reflected their important role as community centers. All of the Nickell's armories contain a large assembly hall/gymnasium area, individual offices/meeting rooms, and garage bays. The buildings have low silhouettes, with usually only the assembly hall rising above the one-story building. They are typically clad in brick. These designs usually include a kitchen and boast the maximum amount of floor space to accommodate community affairs.

The new armories served local communities as civic centers, a situation which took on a more formal status in 1964 when the military board formally adopted a policy of leasing armories to

The author of this article, as well as the preceding issue's article on the three historic armories, is Susan Jezak Ford. She was contracted by the Kansas State Historical Society to prepare the Multiple Property Documentation form entitled "National Guard Armories of Kansas."

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The Remaining Nickell's Armories

- Abilene 1953
- Atchison 1963
- Augusta 1958
- Belleville 1956
- Burlington 1954
- Chanute 1957
- Cherryvale 1956
- Clay Center 1955
- Coffeyville 1956
- Colby 1960
- Concordia 1953
- Council Grove 1954
- Dodge City 1959
- Emporia 1955
- Fort Scott 1955
- Garden City 1958
- Garnett 1955
- Hays 1956
- Holton 1973
- Horton 1954
- Hutchinson 1958
- Iola 1954
- Junction City 1958
- Kansas City 1956
- Larned 1961
- Lawrence 1961
- Liberal 1958
- Manhattan 1955
- Mankato 1958
- Marysville 1954
- Newton 1955
- Norton 1957
- Ottawa 1954
- Phillipsburg 1963
- Pittsburg 1956
- Pratt 1955
- Russell 1956
- Sabetha 1953
- Salina 1956
- Smith Center 1960
- Topeka 1956
- Troy 1953
- Wichita-West 1955
- Wichita-East 1955
- Wichita-South 1958
- Winfield 1953



(Left) The KSARNG Armory at Phillipsburg is home to Detachment 3, 995th Maintenance Company. Photo by Randy Thies.

(Below) The KSARNG Armory at Russell is home to Detachment 3, 170th Maintenance Company. Photo by Randy Thies.

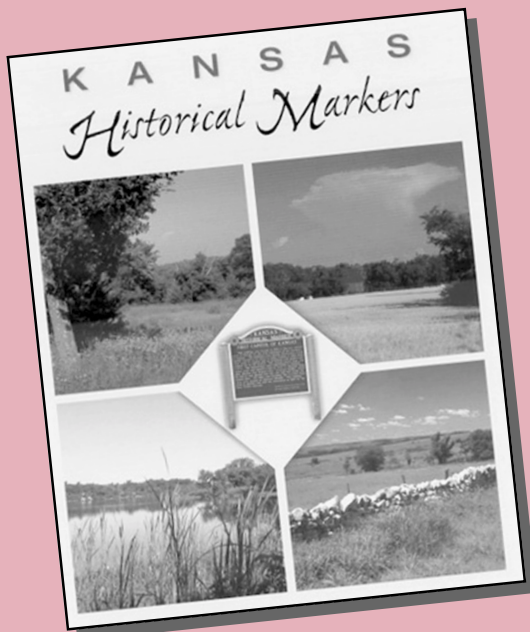


The Nickell's Armories

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various community organizations. Many different uses were made of the buildings as the result of the policy and they became important focal points of community life. Local organizations and groups were only required to pay for utilities and janitorial services and were encouraged to use the armories except for commercial purposes or when Guard events were scheduled. Armories were typically used for meetings of chambers of commerce, Boy or Girl Scouts, various agricultural organizations and basketball practices and games.

Today the KSARNG installation includes 58 armories. Forty-six of them are Cold War armories constructed as dual-function buildings to serve the Guard and the neighboring community. They may not appear architecturally noteworthy to today's observer, but the collection of Nickell's armories can be viewed as historically significant in being a physical manifestation of the Cold War, Joe Nickell's prolific term, and the growing partnership between the military and civilian communities.



Kansas Historical Markers Booklet Available

Copies of the guidebook *Kansas Historical Markers* can be picked up at no cost at the Kansas History Center as well as at any of the state historic sites managed by the Kansas State Historical Society. The colorful 43-page book identifies the 117 historical markers erected along Kansas highways by the Kansas Department of Transportation and the Kansas State Historical Society.

These markers tell stories of Kansas landforms and landmarks, communities, trails, commerce, missions, forts, and Civil War sites. A map of the state is included in the guide along with images of many of the markers, descriptions of locations, and the text of each sign. The guide also groups markers into categories.

Funding for the publication was provided by the Transportation Enhancements program of the Federal Highway Administration through the Kansas Department of Transportation.

Mail requests can be directed to Historical Markers Guide, Kansas State Historical Society, 6425 S.W. Sixth Avenue, Topeka, KS 66615-1099. These requests should be accompanied by a check payable to Kansas State Historical Society for \$2.50 to cover postage and handling.